

# Behind and Beyond The Mask – Art Therapy Group, Exhibitions and Calendar

Mater Child and Youth Mental Health Service, Refugee Health Queensland (Brisbane Clinic), Yeronga State High School



## Overview

Funding - Multicultural Assistance Program 2008-2009.

The aim of the project was two fold.

### Art therapy program and Exhibition of Art Work

- During Term 2 and Term 3 an art therapy program was offered to young people from refugee and multicultural backgrounds at Yeronga State High School.
- Each young person created a mask reflecting their culture of origin and their experience in Australia.
- An initial exhibition was held at the school for staff, students and family.
- An exhibition and launch of the calendar occurred at Mater Health Services – the invitation was extended to family, friends, multicultural community members, agencies and Mater Health Service Staff.

### Calendar of Art Work

- A calendar of the art work including multicultural contacts and background to the project supported awareness of strengths, capabilities and issues for young people from refugee and multicultural backgrounds.

## Origins

In mid 2008, Yeronga State High School in South Brisbane raised a need with Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre (QTMHC) and Mater Child Youth and Mental Health Service (CYMHS) to meaningfully engage young people and their families from refugee backgrounds while improving community relations with access to government and non government services. Given the positive experiences and outcomes from the 'Young Resilience: World Refugee Day 2008' art therapy project with Moorooka State Primary School discussion then occurred between Queensland Integrated Refugee Community Health Clinic - Refugee Health Queensland and Mater CYMHS on ways the services and the established Mater Cultural Diversity Network could further collaborate with and support a secondary school. Focus was on how the various services could encourage resilience building and community connections for young adolescents from a refugee background and their families through the expressive medium of art.

## Objectives

These events aimed to strengthen positive community relationships, enhance community cohesion, and celebrate cultural diversity. The overall purpose of the project was to respond to the needs of young people from refugee backgrounds through art by building self esteem, applying sensitive cross cultural approaches and engaging in collaborative community care.

### To create art that that young refugees from various ethnicities can relate to and reflects the multicultural community.

- *The arts can work cross culturally because they offer so many non-verbal means of expression* (St Thomas and Johnson, 2001, p. 35).
- *The art process could facilitate grief and mourning, tap into individual and family strengths, and begin an integration of their past experiences with their present reality* (Kellogg and Volker, 1993, p. 129).

### Acknowledge and mark the participant's resilience, journey and hope.

- *...creative expression workshops have a positive effect on immigrant and refugee children's self esteem and may decrease their emotional and behavioural symptoms* (Rousseau, Drapeau, Lacroix, Bagilishya and Heusch, 2005, p183)

### To create and strengthen connections between young people, families, education, government and non-government service providers

- *Cultural factors pertaining to adolescents concepts of diagnosis, etiology, treatment and healer required that art therapy function integrally within the community* (Golub, 1989, p18).

### To build connections and capacity in our local multicultural community

- *The unique problems of separation from homeland, culture, friends, and often close family members are readily addressed through the more imaginistic and less verbal activity of art therapy* (Thrasher, Yee and Zahnstecher, 1989, 59).

### To highlight how the Mater's Mission and core values of Mercy, Dignity, Care, Compassion and Quality underpin and interrelate with multiculturalism's core values of harmony, cultural diversity and social cohesion.



## Collaborators

- The young women who participated in the art therapy program from various multicultural backgrounds and their families
- Community bi-cultural workers and community leaders
- Yeronga State High School
- Multicultural Affairs Queensland – Department of Communities
- Mater Child and Youth Mental Health Service – Yeronga Kids in Mind clinic, Mater CYMHS Day Program and CYMHS Management Unit
- Refugee Health Queensland – Brisbane Clinic
- Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre
- Mater Cultural Diversity Network
- Peta Hayden - Photographer

## Activities / Strategies

### January 2009

- Informed of successful grant application

### February 2009

- Negotiate with school

### March 2009

- Art therapist role and position
- Recruit art therapist

### April 2009

- Liaise with school and ESL
- Recruitment of young person

### May 2009

- Group 1 commences

### June 2009

- Calendar as final product chosen by young women

### July 2009

- Collaborative meetings between Yeronga High School, Refugee Health and Mater CYMHS
- Recruitment for second group

### August 2009

- First group finishes
- Second group begins
- Event preparation begins

### September 2009

- Planning and compilation of Calendar
- Workshop planning with Refugee Health

### October 2009

- Invitations are disseminated
- Calendar is finalised for printing

### November 2009

- School event and exhibition
- Refugee Health Student workshop
- Mater event and exhibition – Calendar launch

### December 2009

- Calendar distribution
- Reporting to Multicultural Affairs Queensland

## Session Outline

### Session 1

The participants decorated a paper gingerbread person that represented themselves. This was used in all the sessions for a visual check-in and check out. The paper figures were placed between a smiling sun shape and a frowning cloud shape. This represented how the participants felt at the beginning and end of the session. Pre-group evaluations were completed.

### Session 2

A large group drawing of images that represented their home country and a second group drawing about their experience of living in Australia was created.

### Session 3

Drawings with colour, line, mark-making to express emotions about leaving their home country and arriving in Australia.

### Session 4

Creating the basic shape for the mask and cutting the shape out of cardboard. Demonstrating of building up features on the mask using paper mache.

### Sessions 5-7

Constructing masks

### Session 6-8

Painting masks incorporating colour as emotion (session 3) for the base of mask and images of home country and Australia (session 2) for decorating and embellishing the mask.

### Session 9

Group discussion about the stories behind the masks. A group painting on canvas about their experience of the group. Post-group evaluation was completed.

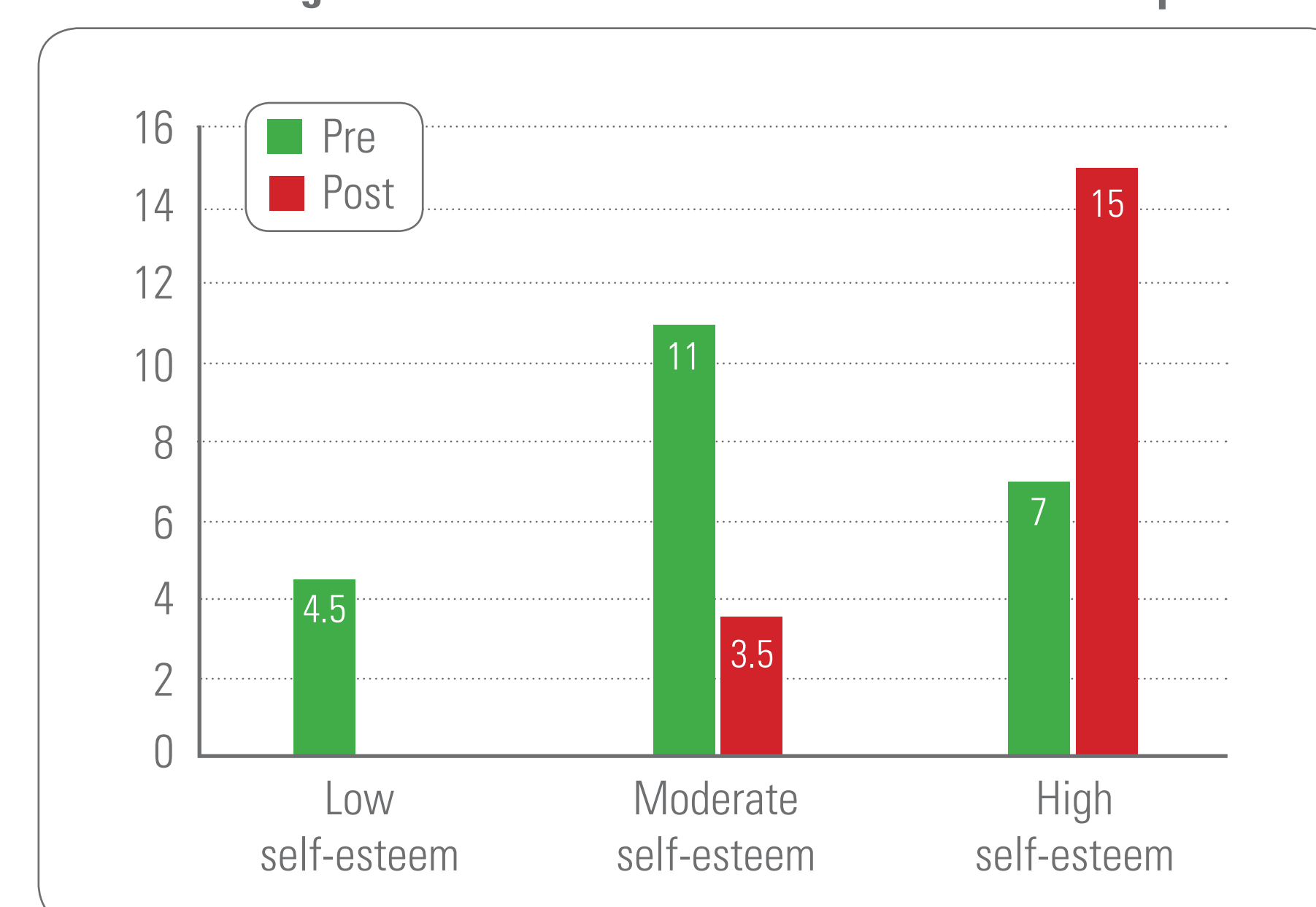
## Outcomes

"I liked meeting the other girls and working as a team"

"I liked making masks. I enjoyed being in the group, it was really fantastic"

"I love working in groups and I love art. I like communicating with other and the community workers"

### Teacher Ratings of Students Self-esteem Pre and Post Group



## Future

- Conference and presentations
- Manual of Mask Making art therapy group
- Future group to be facilitated at Yeronga State High School

## References

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